

# First-responder software is on its way to county

## HOMELAND SECURITY:

*Nonprofit wants Western New York to be a "guinea pig."*

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CHEEKTOWAGA — Niagara County soon will benefit from some free software that will help it communicate with other jurisdictions in the event of a disaster.

The Stargazer Foundation, a Virginia nonprofit founded by Art Bushkin, a businessman who earned millions in the Internet boom, seeks to help the public good by providing technology tools that would otherwise be out of reach for cash-strapped organizations.

"There is not enough money on the planet ... to have every jurisdiction, every school ... build the same thing," Bushkin said at an unveiling of the technology Monday at the Erie County Emergency Services Training and Operations Center.

Bushkin partnered with Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-Fairport, to bring technology to jurisdictions in the 28th Congressional district that will help first responders communicate. Western New York is the first area in which the Stargazer technology will be used.

The lack of communication has been cited as a chief con-

cern by both local first responders and police and fire crews that responded on Sept. 11, 2001, to the attacks in Somerset, Pa., New York City and Washington, D.C.

The 28th district includes four international crossings, a major tourist destination in Niagara Falls and several power and chemical plants, and Slaughter said it has more potential terrorist targets than most other members of Congress can claim.

"You are the first," Bushkin told first responders from across Western New York who attended the demonstration. "We needed a group, some guinea pigs if you will."

Stargazer officials hope local police and fire personnel will offer feedback on the software so it can be refined.

So far, Bushkin has contributed \$25 million to the foundation since it began five years ago, and Niagara County first responders will have access to expensive software it most likely could not purchase on its own.

Following an hour-long demonstration by Bushkin and a colleague, local officials said they were looking forward to going to the Stargazer Web site to set up a site tailored to the county and see first-hand what it could do.

"There's no doubt it looks like it will work," said county Emergency Services Coordinator James Volkosh.

"It's something we want to look at," said Sheriff Thomas Beilein, who attended the unveiling with the department's technology experts.

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